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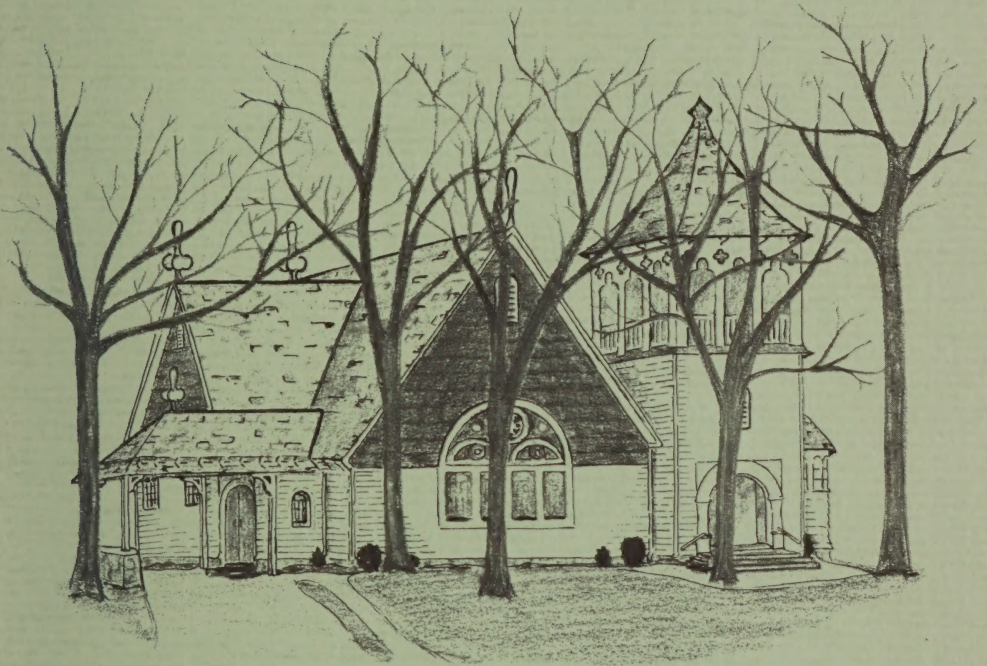


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History
of
The Reformed Church
Bedminster, New Jersey



1758 - - - 1958

SAT. May 8, 1956

TOUR OF HOMES

THE STORY OF A MISSION CHURCH THAT BECAME A CHURCH WITH A MISSION

The land that has seen the three sanctuaries of the Bedminster Reformed Church was once wilderness. The Indian roamed it as his domain for hunting and fishing. It was not a densely populated land, though fertile enough and beautiful. No roads existed, no settlements even, except for the ever shifting villages of the natives. The trails followed the river; the river ran to the sea; and down by the sea the white man presently came and made for himself a home. After a time the white man came up the river, began to settle in the fertile valley, bought land from the Indian or drove him out before his advance. It all happened a long time ago.

The first tract of land purchased in the area of what is now Bedminster Township was a conveyance to one Margaret Winder on May 20, 1690. The parcel of land indicated seems to have been in the neighborhood of the Lamington River junction with the North Branch of the Raritan River. On an old 1766 map found in the Governor Clinton collection there are two holdings under the Winder name: Grahem and Samuel Winder. This family name, though early, postdates the establishment of Somerset County in 1688.

Into this area "which had never been pressed by human feet save by those of the soft-stepping, stealthy savages, came burly Dutchmen wearing hats of generous brim, broad belts, and stout leather jerkins; the smoke from their pipes, fragrant with the odors of the best Virginia, mingling with the breath of the woods and exuberant herbage." (Mellick)

The Dutch came from other settlements, notably New Amsterdam and Long Island, and in increasing numbers from the homeland, bringing with them their love of liberty, their love of learning and their love of the Church. The whole area from New Brunswick west as far as Lebanon became a Reformed Church parish covering two hundred square miles.

The interdependence of these early settlers, in

establishing clearings, in constructing their crude log cabins, and in opening trails through the forests linking neighbor with neighbor, produced a spirit of independence which gave way to a movement for self-government as early as 1703.

The Dutch Reformed Church was formally organized in the Raritan Valley about 1695. A royal charter was granted by King George the Second, on June 7, 1753, to five churches "to wit, the Church and Congregation of Raritan (now First Church, Somerville, the Church and Congregation of North Branch (now Readington), the Church and Congregation of New Brunswick, the Church and Congregation of Six Mile Run, the Church and Congregation of Millstone." The Charter is a long document using the many and usual formal phrases of the day. The following excerpt is interesting since it gives a summary of what the King expected of these churches in the New World:

"That the most advantageous support of religion among them requires that some persons among them should be incorporated as trustees for the community, that they take grants of land and chattels, thereby to enable the petitioners to erect and repair public buildings for the worship of God, school-houses and alms-houses, and for the maintenance of the ministry and poor, ... and we having nothing more at heart than to see the Protestant Religion in a flourishing condition throughout all our dominions, and being graciously pleased to give all due encouragement to such of our loving subjects, who are zealously attached to our person, government and the Protestant succession, ... Know ye that we *** do will, ordain, constitute, and appoint that the Rev. John Light, John Frelinghuysen, ministers, *** elders, and *** deacons of the Dutch Reformed Congregations aforesaid *** shall be and remain one body politick and corporate *** ."

Two other Raritan valley churches predate the Bedminster Church: Harlingen was organized in 1727 and Neshanic in 1752.

Also prior to the formation of the Bedminster Church three churches of sister denominations existed in the Bedminster area and served the community for some time. The Lutheran settlers on top of what is locally referred to as Pigtown Mountain (some call it Pigtail Mountain) obtained land for a church and parsonage sometime between 1714 and 1740. This location seems to have served the Lutherans from Basking Ridge on the north to Bound Brook on the south, and from the Lamington River to the Passaic. The original site lies about a mile southeast of the Schley Glider Field off the road (general location of Mt. Prospect Road) which runs over the mountain from Pluckemin to Liberty Corner (then Annan's Corners). Two gravestones marked the spot, and rested against an old hickory tree as late as the nineteen forties.

The Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church began at New Germantown (now Oldwick) in 1748, with the building dating from 1749. Since by 1755 the Pigtail Mountain Church had all but disintegrated, the remaining congregation readily agreed to unite in the formation of a Pluckemin Church which was built in 1758. The two churches entered into a collegiate arrangement with the New Germantown congregation. The new church, known as St. Paul's, met in a stone house of worship. One of the names appearing on their subscription list is that of Jacobus Van Derveer of Van Derveer Mills who was so influential in the later history of our community and our church.

The English, Scotch, and Irish who came into the area were mostly Presbyterian. They found the privilege of worship in the Lamington Presbyterian Church built in 1740.

It was during the forties and fifties that colonists moved into the area to create communal life and organization. The list of Freeholders of 1753 indicates the presence of the progenitors of several of our well-known Bedminster families of the present day. The 1766 Clinton Map gives the location of a dozen houses at the Lesser Cross Roads (now Bedminster) of that time.

Below the Cross Roads, at the previously

mentioned Van Derveer's Mills, trails from Peapack, Lamington and Washington Valley converged. It was at the fords on the present Bedminster-Pluckemin road that crossing of the North Branch in this locality was accomplished. The river there is not deep. Even in the last century farmers frequently drove their wagons through the stream to soak up the wheels and to quench the thirst of their beasts at the same place where Indians originally forded it. The bridge was first erected there sometime after 1751 and before 1766.

It would appear from the records that remain that Jacobus Van Derveer was the first Dutchman in this part of the Bedminster Township to take up rather extensive holdings, to remain on them to improve them, and to take his place as a public-spirited citizen in the annals of history. He bought acreage around the crossing of the North Branch, described above, on December 30, 1754. Two hundred eighty-three acres were assigned to Jacobus and Garret Van Derveer.

The Van Derveer House was built in 1760 on the east side of the road, presently 202-206, near the bridge. It is a fine old Dutch country house, now owned by John Pontin. Across the road, not far off, another place known as the "Knox" house still stands. This is also one of the Van Derveer places. Located only a few hundred yards south of the Bedminster Cemetery, it is at present known as the Brice home.

In the intervening years between 1751 and 1760 there seems to have been only a few log homes, temporary pioneer dwellings, in the neighborhood of the ford and the "corners". One belonged to Jacobus Van Derveer and the other to Ephraim McDowell. One of the inheritors of the McDowell land later married into the Sutphen family.

The Township of Bedminster was granted patent under that name on April 4, 1749. The name Bedminster, like that of its neighbor Bridgewater, is derived from similar names in Somersetshire in England.

On Christmas Day, December 25, 1758, in the Old Dutch Parsonage, Raritan, New Jersey, Jacobus Rutzen

Hardenbergh met with the officials of the Raritan, Harlingen, and Readington Churches, and a statement was recorded on the minutes to the effect that a consistory was to be formed for the founding of a Bedminster Church. The constituency of the church was to be obtained from the members in this area and the church was to be under the jurisdiction of the Raritan Church. There is a mention made of the Reformed Church of Bedminster as early as October 1758, but it was this meeting that provided for formal organization.

On December 13, 1758, a line was drawn between the Bedminster and Raritan Churches to give some jurisdictional clearance for pastor and people. It is not known that any penalties were laid upon those who did not follow the line of demarcation between the congregations. In fact, no one today seems to be able to tell us where the line ran.

Dominie Hardenbergh, who was to serve as first minister of the Bedminster Congregation, occupies a unique place in Reformed Church history. A word about his background will prove interesting. His predecessor at Raritan was the Rev. John Frelinghuysen, the last student to be sent to Holland for his theological training. After his ordination there, John brought back with him from Holland his bride, Dinah Van Bergh, one of the most remarkable women in the history of the Reformed Church in America. He also brought back the bricks to build "the Old Dutch Parsonage." Here four men, including Hardenburgh, were trained for the Christian ministry. The Parsonage was, in reality, the first theological seminary of the Dutch Church in America, and Hardenbergh was the first man to be ordained by a group of ministers in America.

Upon Frelinghuysen's death at an early age, Hardenburgh was called to the pastorate at Raritan on May 1, 1758. Meanwhile Dinah Van Bergh Frelinghuysen, having lost her husband through death, had decided to return to her home in Holland. On the day before she was to start on her Journey, Hardenburgh proposed marriage. In astonishment, she replied "Why, child, what are you thinking about!" He was seventeen and she was thirty. But so ardent was this young lover that she finally

gave her consent. It proved a wonderful marriage and for the next thirty years they carried on a noble ministry. Incidentally, Dinah survived her second husband by seventeen years, dying in 1807 at the age of eighty one.

The first officers of the new church were: Elders Henrick Banta, Jacobus Van Derveer and Deacons Rynier Van Nest and Cornelius Lane. The Van Nest family was very old; Peter Van Nest settled in the Readington neighborhood about 1695. The Lane family also had been long established, and possessed holdings two miles east of Lesser Cross Roads. Matthias Laenen (Lane) and his brother-in-law, Guisbert Sutphen, came from Monmouth in 1744 and settled on land purchased from the Johnston Tract.

Leading men in the first Bedminster Church included Peter Van Derveer, Matthew Lane, and Guisbert Sutphen. A record of other old families would certainly include the family of Philip Van Arsdalen (Van Arsdale) who came to the Readington district about 1728, Andrew Ten Eyck who came shortly after, and the family names of Vroom, Van Dyke, Schenck, Woertman (Wortman), and Stryker.

Jacobus Van Derveer and Guisbert Sutphen, offered land sites for the new Bedminster Church. Each of the two also wished to donate half of the oak timber for the framing and fifty pounds of sterling for other expenses.

Inasmuch as Sutphen's offer of land had restrictions not acceptable to the consistory, the church officers accepted his offer of timber only and chose the land offered by Van Derveer. Two acres comprising this land were in the area which we now know as the Bedminster Cemetery. The farmers of the countryside agreed to lend their animals for drawing the timber and their labor for the erection of the church building.

James Goltra of Liberty Corner, carpenter and churchbuilder, came over to supervise the construction. The design followed was very similar to that of the neighboring Readington Church. The building was rec-

tangular in shape and faced towards the south. There were three doors on the original plan, but members of the congregation entered by the middle door, which opened to a single aisle opposite the pulpit. This made the width of the church much greater than its depth. The choir was seated in a gallery which was on the south end opposite the pulpit; the steep pitch of the gable roof allowed very little head-room in the gallery. The interior of the church was boarded with beautiful pine or cedar boards. The pews were high-backed, typical of the period. They had no cushions. There were no carpets on the floor and no provision was made for heating. Whatever heat there was came from the warm hearts of the worshippers and the spiritual fervor of the preacher in the pulpit. Some people carried foot charcoal burners to and from the church for personal comfort.

The exterior, roof and sides, were shingled with the old-fashioned type of hand-shaked rounded shingle. The windows were tall though the individual panes of glass were small in accordance with the manufacture of the period. Some descriptions say the window frames were square. It is quite certain that the only materials which did not come from this locality were the window-glass and the hand-wrought nails. Probably the nails came from Morris County forges.

Before the new building was completed the first grave was needed in the churchyard for Phebe Ditmars, wife of Jacobus Van Derveer, who passed this life, September 11, 1759, at the age of 53.

In the northeast corner of the property are other early graves: Rachel Longstreet, wife of William Van Doren, 1763; Margaret, wife of Stephen Hunt, 1769; Sarah Van Nest, wife of Peter Wortman, 1771, Robert Blair, 1800.

To the east of the building other important graves appeared: Guisbert Sutphen, 76, November 16, 1796, and Areantje, his wife, 68, May 31, 1788.

West of the building lay the Van Derveer plot with the exception of Phebe's grave already mentioned. The

following epitaph occurs among the Van Derveers:

"Sacred to the memory of Elias Van Derveer, who died 29th Nov. 1778, in the 33d year of his age. In consequence of his cruel incarceration while prisoner to the British army, a detachment of which had been expressly sent out for the purpose of taking him by surprise, with a few other active and spirited Whigs of the Revolution in this vicinage."

Other family plots of an early date include: Schenck, Hardenburgh, Powelson, Van Arsdale, Conover, Nevius, Vroom, Voorhees, Van Doren, Melick, Demott, Tiger, Wolf, and Wyckoff. According to the custom of the day not all the people were buried in the churchyard; several family plots were scattered throughout Bedminster.

The attention of our Bedminster people should be drawn to two burying grounds used for the Negroes in the community. The first of these, located on the small half-acre upon which the present Municipal Building stands, was a local slave burying place. The second site is larger and fairly well-known. It can be found on the Hickory Corner Road running south from the public road which now connects Bedminster with Lamington. (Hickory Corners was the old name given to the junction of the present Larger Cross Roads and River Road.) The visitor will note the large number of markers and the interesting coincidence of the names there with the old leading surnames of this part of the country. The slaves buried there quite naturally took the last name of the master for whom they worked.

Another note should be made in passing. The Bedminster cemetery contains stone-markers with no corresponding graves. In every popular well-kept churchyard one will find this phenomenon. It simply means that the stones have been brought by pious persons from other burying-places whose original uses through the years have long since disappeared. For example, certain Van Derveer, Nevius and Voorhees stones were brought to our Old Bedminster Cemetery from the so-called Dr. Lawrence Van Derveer Burying-Ground at Roycefield, south of New Brunswick, when the latter place fell into disuse.

The first school house stood on a road which led from Lesser Cross Roads to Van Derveer's Mills. The school was located in the field (former Wyckoff tract) just southeast of the junction of Route 202-206.

Those were strenuous days, for the families came to church on horseback and by other various means of conveyance, carried their dinners and sat the full length of the morning and till dark in the afternoon. No little pressure was exerted on disobedient church members. The records are full of rebukes for card playing, stealing watermelons, profanity, the imbibing of spiritous liquids, dancing, and other manifestly unchristian behavior of church members.

Already under the pressure of serving his four churches, Dominie Hardenburgh was put under even greater strain by the Revolutionary War. Because he was an ardent patriot, the British put a price on his head. It is reported that the young minister kept a musket by his bedside during the night for protection. During the military campaign in the Raritan Valley, a warm friendship sprang up between Hardenburgh and George Washington.

Between Van Derveer's Mills and the site of the old church, the "Knox House" was occupied twice by General and Mrs. Henry Knox during the Revolutionary War. During their residence in July 1779, their infant daughter, Julia, died from some violent paroxysm. The Bedminster Church officers, fainthearted lest this be an evidence of "demon possession", still much believed in, and uncertain as to whether a Congregationalist should be buried in the churchyard, refused burial permission in the consecrated area.

The host of the Knoxes, Jacob Van Derveer, had himself experienced the loss of a small daughter under similar circumstances and had buried the body in his own land adjacent to the cemetery. He offered his ground and it was accepted. Sometime afterwards the land was deeded to the church for burial purposes, and the fences were moved to include the two bodies.

Passing along the Larger Cross Roads, en route to Yorktown toward the close of the War, Washington and

his staff stopped at John Sutphen's Inn to refresh themselves. Guisbert and his son, Peter Sutphen, members of the Bedminster Church, were reported present on that occasion.

The Lesser Cross Roads began its life pretty much after the war. The 1766 map shows a few scattered farmsteads on the hillside now marking the site of the village. With the opening of the trail to Bernardsville, the place became increasingly important. John Melick is reported to have built his Bedminster Tavern in 1786 and to have remained there as its host until about 1800, when he seems to have been succeeded by one Captain William Fullerson. The story of the Melick family (the spellings differ), who were the original owners of the land on which the present church stands, has been delightfully told by the late Plainfield lawyer and descendent, Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., in "The Story of An Old Farm". The value of this book lies in its comprehensive review of the life and times of old Somerset. In 1948 the Rutgers University Press printed a shortened edition under the title, "Lesser Crossroads".

In 1784 Hardenbergh left to become the first installed President of Queen's College (Rutgers) of which he had been the prime organizer.

His successor in the Raritan and Bedminster Churches was the Rev. Theodore F. Romeyn who died in August 1785 at the early age of twenty five. His mortal remains were deposited in the Ministers' Tomb in Old Cemetery, Somerville.

The Rev. John Duryee was installed as pastor of the Raritan and Bedminster Churches in 1786. He was to be assisted by Peter Studdiford, a part time pastor from 1784 until 1800 - part time in the sense that he had oversight of the Congregation. By the terms of his call, Dr. Duryee was to preach in English in the Bedminster Church, while in the Raritan Church, half of the sermons were to be in Dutch and half in English. The following resolution was adopted on August 3, 1789: "Consistory of Bedminster agreed that divine service be performed in English till such time as Elders and Deacons think proper to alter." Meanwhile on May 28, 1789,

another milestone had been reached: "Raritan and Bedminster Consistories agree to transact all their church affairs in English after this."

Back of these resolutions and the earlier ordination of Hardenbergh in America, lies the growth of the American democratic ideal in the minds of second, third, and fourth generation Dutchmen. The independent spirit of the Church was in keeping with the general spirit pervading the American colonies at the time. In 1771, the Dutch Church in America had been granted independence by the Classis of Amsterdam with the right to train and ordain men to the ministry. The next logical step was to drop the use of the Dutch language in divine service. While the old folks and recent arrivals felt that much would be lost in religion if the stately language of the homeland was not continued, the majority of members rightly felt that a Dutch Church could have no appeal to the growing English speaking population of the Eastern seaboard. Finally, with the formulation and adoption of a Constitution in 1791, the one hundred sixteen existing Reformed Churches became a fully independent organized denomination on the American scene.

The Bedminster Church became a charter member of the Classis of New Brunswick in 1791. It was not until 1859 that the Classis of Raritan, with which we are presently affiliated, was organized.

The collegiate arrangement between the Raritan and Bedminster Churches must have ended about 1798. However, there is no precise information since a blank occurs in the records of the church between 1791 and 1800. Sometime around 1798 a collegiate relationship that had lasted for forty years came to an end as the Bedminster Church, now grown to maturity and self-sufficiency, determined to have her own full-time pastor. The Church had already obtained official recognition from the State of New Jersey by incorporation under its laws in September 1791. The officers of the church at the time were: Elders - John Voorhees, Cornelius Powelson, Aaron Van Doren and Matthias Lane; Deacons - Stephen Hunt and Philip T. Van Arsdale.

The Township of Bedminster was not overcrowded in

1795. A list of post offices in New Jersey as of January 1 of that year gives but one in the vicinity, that of New Germantown (Oldwick). Pluckemin, however, antedates Oldwick. The first postmaster there was Matthew Lane followed by Jacob Van Doren and Captain Joseph Nevius. The village post office in Bedminster was not established until about 1835.

The records show that on November 13, 1800, a call was sent to the Reverend John Schureman, descendant of the Jacobus of that name who had been the companion of the Rev. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, second pastor of Raritan. Schureman was to receive a stipend of \$460.00 per annum in equal semi-annual payments. There is no record of an acceptance or of an installation. That his service began in 1801 is indicated from the records of the reception of new members. By 1807 the new pastor had received forty-nine new parishioners. This same year, Schureman left to take up the call of the Hillsborough Church at Millstone.

He appears to have been a man of scholarly attainments. His scholastic record was splendid. The Doctor of Sacred Theology degree was conferred upon him in 1816 by Columbia College, New York. Elected Vice-President of Queen's in 1809, he occupied the chair of Moral Philosophy and Belles-Lettres from 1811 until 1818 and the chair of Ecclesiastical History in the Seminary from 1815 until 1818. He died May 15, 1818, about seven years before the name of his Alma Mater was changed from Queen's to Rutgers (in 1825). His remains are in the graveyard of the Second Reformed Church at New Brunswick. A great man, Dr. Schureman did much to rekindle the religious fires in this church following the downgrade years of the struggle for independence throughout the nation.

The successor to Dr. Schureman was a man of quite different type. Charles Hardenbergh came to Bedminster shortly after, in July 1808. Interesting stories have come down through the years concerning the exploits of this pastor. He founded a classical school and encouraged and elevated the standard of education in Bedminster generally. His great influence did much toward making Bedminster one of the strong churches of the

denomination. His popularity was undoubted. He had the ability to fill the church, in fact to overcrowd the original building. A contemporary reported: "His voice is sonorous and sweet, and his accentuation proper, impressive and indicative of fine taste." Extra pew arrangements were tried to no avail; a new edifice was an urgent necessity. It must be remembered that subscriptions for church expenses, particularly the minister's salary, came from so-called "pew rentals". The church officials actually issued "deeds" for pew ownership. One of the things which caused some local furor when it came to financing a new church was the attempt to sell the pews at auction. Another matter of concern was the desire on the part of some to build the second church at Pluckemin. This petition was considered and then voted down.

The matter of a new church was agitated for several years, until finally, in an official congregational meeting of September 15, 1815, the building of a new church by the site of the old and facing south, in the same direction, was acted upon favorably. James Van Derveer began the financial campaign by making a gift of one hundred and two dollars. Interestingly enough, the minutes record that whenever a subscription was due and not paid, by order of Consistory the treasurer was ordered to collect interest as well! Those who have seen pictures of the church or the building itself, which was dedicated April 12, 1818, will certainly speak in full praise of the general over-all plan of construction. Pastor Hardenburgh preached the dedicatory sermon using as his text, Psalm 122, verses 8 and 9: "For my brethren and companion's sakes, I will now say, Peace be with thee. Because of the house of our God I will seek thy good."

The name of the master-builder of the second Bedminster Church remains unknown. It is assumed by certain of our oldest citizens that the son and grandsons of the James Goltra, who built the first church, were asked to superintend the erection of the second, which cost when completed \$6,675.50. The choice of type, a modified colonial, and the selection of wood rather than stone carried out the current tradition.

Hard red sandstone was hauled in from the quarries on the Pluckemin mountain road and a strong foundation was laid. The church was built without cellar excavation. The ground plan called for an area of sixty-five by forty-eight feet.

Great oak logs were dragged to the site of erection and the material squared with the broadaxe, hand hewn. The sills were laid with heavy oak between twelve and eighteen inches square. Each of the four huge corner sticks measure twenty-six feet in height and was eighteen inches square.

It was the fashion in those days to raise smaller buildings in sections of four-foot bents or pre-frames, then to tie the bents together with plate tie-beams. It is conceivable that this church may have been raised in bents from window to window all the way across, but it does not seem to be too likely. Even the rear wall was of huge proportions and itself contained some window area. But if the four sides were raised in sections it took all the available manpower in the neighborhood to do the "raisin".

The eighteen-inch corner posts referred to were too stout for the wall construction of the sides; therefore, a six-inch rabbet was removed before erection, to make thereby the overall thickness of the wall but twelve inches.

Unlike earlier buildings of the day used for homes, the space between outside clapboards and inside lath and plaster was not filled with stubble, chaff and earth. At a later time the interior was given a "period" galvanized covering.

The church had thirty windows of 48 panes each, with the largest amount of light coming through the side windows, eight to the side. The congregation entered through the main door into a vestry. Two small doors to either side led to the galleries. Another pair of doors led in to the church side-aisles, for one faced the congregation as one entered.

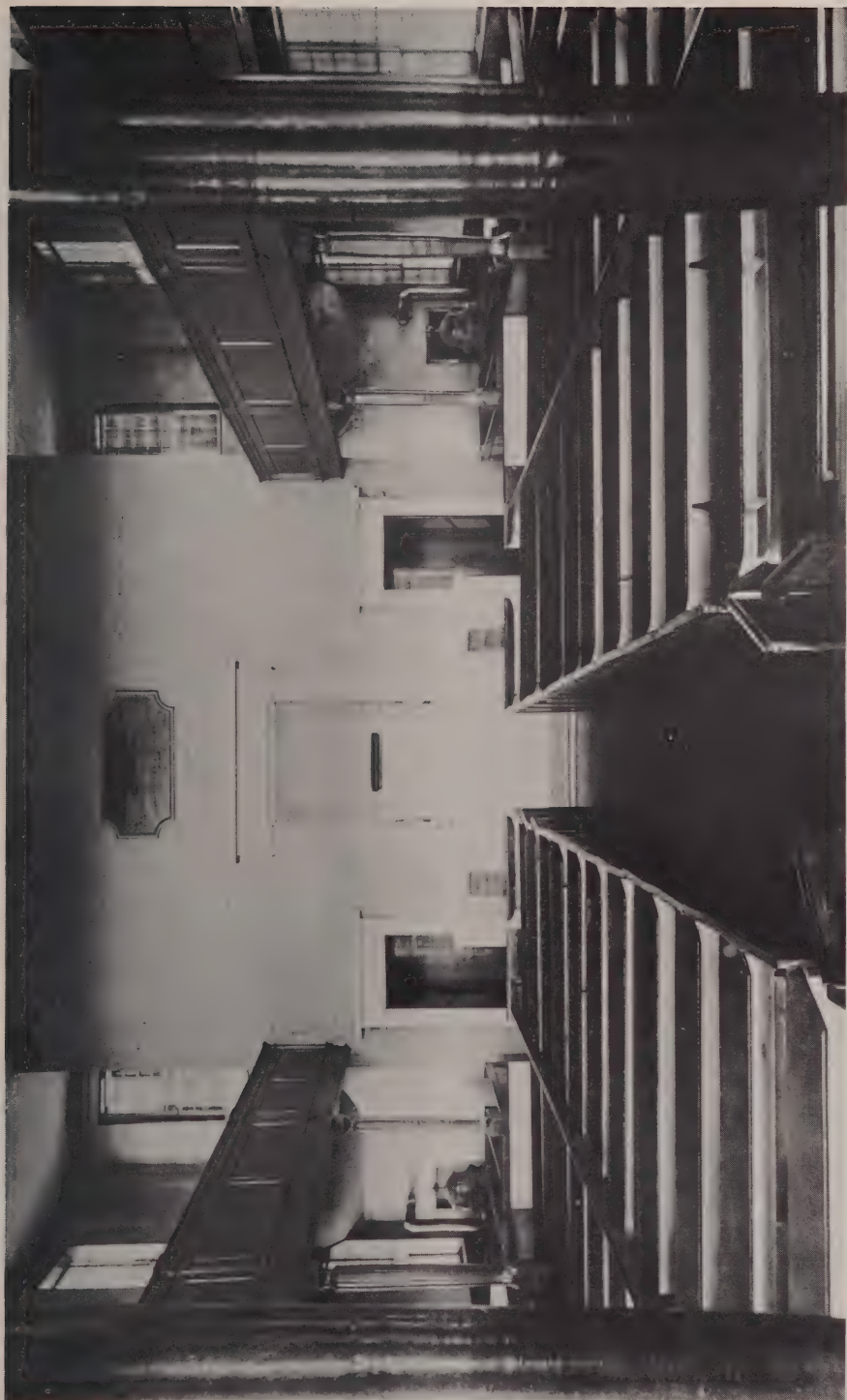
The pulpit rostrum was rather high with two pairs



Rev. Robert T. Marsh
whose pastorate started 1951



Second Building of the Bedminster Congregation Erected 1818



Interior of Second Building



Third Building of the Bedminster Congregation Erected 1896



Christmas Eve Candlelighting Showing Interior



New Educational Building Erected 1957

Photo by Harry B. Clay Jr.



Entrance Foyer - New Educational Building

Photo by Harry B. Clay Jr.



First Floor showing Kindergarten - Nursery, Junior Room
and Kitchen - New Educational Building

Photo by Harry B. Clay Jr.

of steps ascending on opposite sides from the front. It was decreed that only licensed or ordained ministers could occupy the pulpit to officiate in a ministerial capacity either at the request or by and with the consent of the Consistory. A dispute arose concerning the heating and lighting of the new building. Stoves were finally installed, one on either side of the pulpit, and later another at the rear behind the congregation. But not for at least a half century was the church provided with lamps for illumination.

The galleries of seats -- three tiered -- extended on three sides but not above the pulpit and rostrum. Round wooden columns supported the galleries. Under the bell tower was a small room for prayer.

Above the roof was trussed in cantilever construction to produce a rounded arch over the main part of the auditorium. It was flat above the galleries. Above the rear gallery the arch was highly modified.

Someone has remarked that there was enough timber in the roof used to make that intricate arch construction to build a couple of houses. One can conjecture how important this must have been to the stability of the building, lacking as it did tie-beams or tie-rods, which otherwise would have been carried in some fashion across the main auditorium to assist in counteracting the outward thrust of the roof on its walls.

At the front elevation one will observe from the old photographs a magnificent square tower surmounted by an octagonal lantern and crowned or capped with a round roof, at first shingled like the rest of the roof but later covered with metal. Two huge twenty-six or twenty-eight foot posts helped to support the weight of the tower and the bell giving the effect of a pillared portico.

The pews were boxed-in with doors and were high-backed so that the slanted reading board which held the hymnbooks was sufficiently high to enable one to read when standing. The pew in front carried the reading board for the occupant in the pew to the rear.

The church had three aisles - a middle and two side aisles. At either side of the middle aisle below the pulpit rostrum were two stalls of different arrangement from the ordinary pews. At first the pastor's family occupied one and the church officers the other. Later this seating plan was modified.

The choir sat in the rear gallery. The only instrument was the tuning fork. Years later a small harmonium was installed. The Negroes of the community usually sat in the gallery.

In later years strips of carpet were placed in the aisles. Pew cushions came even later. As with stoves, all forms of personal comfort came slowly. Personal comfort and religion were not happy playmates. Religion was rugged!

When it came time to erect a new church in the village, the late Tom Moore, a local resident, was prevailed upon to remove the second church from its site in the Cemetary. This Old Bedminster Meeting House, as it has been called, had had its tower removed, been placed on the slides, and had been moved about five hundred feet when catastrophe struck. One windy night during the process the breezes caught the top-heavy structure, toppled it over and crumpled it to pieces. The structure was a total wreck. Fortunately, it happened at night and no one was injured in the local disaster. Some said it was a good thing for the old building might have been turned to some ignominious use.

In April 1819, his work apparently accomplished, Hardenbergh accepted a call to The Reformed Church of Greenwich in New York City. The church had its pulpit filled with student supplies for two years. Then in May 1821, The Reverend Isaac M. Fisher, one of those supplies, about to be graduated from the Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, received a call and began active duties in September. His call included a stipend of \$550 per annum. The church had no manse of its own then.

Pastor Fisher was young, active, and enthusiastic.

His gifts, both physical and spiritual, were admirably suited to his task. He met the needs of rich and poor. He ministered alike to white and colored. As a matter of fact, he left behind him the record of a special and gigantic effort to make the gospel and the Bedminster Church attractive to the Negro families of the neighborhood.

This remarkable man labored to match the challenge of the new church with the challenge of new lives. It was during his pastorate that the Bedminster Missionary Society was organized in August 1823, as a men's organization. An examination of the results of his ministry of eighteen years, so far as figures go, is impressive: three hundred and five new members, five hundred seventy four baptisms, one hundred nineteen marriages.

Pastor Fisher resigned to go to Newburgh, New York, in 1838, but returned a year later to his beloved Bedminster with a second call in his hand. Before his reinstallation, he died in February 1840, and was buried in the old churchyard where a marble stone, erected by the Church, marks his last resting place.

On December 29, 1840, the Reverend George Schenck was ordained and installed as minister at Bedminster by the Classis of New Brunswick. It was during this pastorate that we have copies of regular reports from the Church to the Classis.

The new parsonage for the pastor, and the first owned by the congregation, was located on property which constitutes a triangular wedge of land at the junction of present Routes 202 and 206. The house, built in 1850, is still standing, although remodeled, and presently is owned by Mr. Harry and Miss Effie Beekman. At a much later date, this residence was used as an Academy by Dominie McNair. The land consisting of three acres was purchased from David Nevius. Most of the masonry and carpentry work was accomplished by donated labor from the congregation. The names of Stephen Sutphen, David Schomp, and Philip Van Arsdale are particularly mentioned.

The Church reached its greatest numerical strength

under the Schenck ministry with 1000 members on the rolls and five Sabbath Schools. Incidentally, Bedminster has had under her care during her history seven different Sunday Schools: Lesser Crossroads, Mt. Prospect, Pluckemin, Washington Valley, Bedminster, Peapack and Mine Brook. Two of these later became regular churches; the Pluckemin Presbyterian Church and the Peapack Reformed Church.

The high-water mark of spiritual interest, judging by the story of records, is the date of April 7, 1847, in the Easter Season, when Pastor Schenck received seventy new members into the church fellowship. This tremendous influx into the Church was coincident with the resurgence of Presbyterianism throughout New Jersey.

In 1838, with the leaving of Pastor Fisher, the members of the Congregation living in the Peapack area petitioned for an independent church organization. The matter was delayed over a period of ten years, but in 1848 the Peapack Reformed Church was organized with thirty one members of the Bedminster Church and began a separate existence.

Toward the close of Dominie Schenck's ministry, the members of the Congregation residing in the vicinity of the village of Pluckemin, who had had no church of their own since the old stone Lutheran Church went out of existence in 1778, petitioned this church for permission to create a separate organization. The matter seems not to have been handled very judiciously by the official bodies of the Bedminster Church or Classis to which the people of Pluckemin appealed their case.

The Pluckemin group thereupon addressed themselves to the Presbyterians, seeking permission to organize from the Presbytery of Elizabeth. Since approval was not long in coming, a Presbyterian congregation was begun. Eighty two members withdrew to form the new Pluckemin Church. Someone made matters worse by recommending and obtaining the approval of those concerned for building a "competitive" chapel at Pluckemin. This was in "bad taste" and the rivalry most unfortunate. Both Presbyterianism and the Reformed Dutch tradition spring from similar molds, save for minor divergencies.

It took the passing of two generations to forget the unpleasantness. The small structure of the dissident group, still standing adjacent to the Presbyterian building, serves as part of their Sunday School facilities.

Pastor Schenck, never a strong man physically, although possessed of indomitable energy and perseverance, died quite suddenly in 1852, and his remains lie in the Old Bedminster Cemetery. The death of this most remarkable man was greatly lamented by the Congregation. Thus did Bedminster lose by death her second successive minister.

The Rev. William Brush, who came to Bedminster in September 1852, had to bind up a few church and family hurts and smarts. His long pastorate through the years of the Civil War until 1865 attests to his ability to hold the congregation together. He seems to have taken a particular interest in the political issues of the war and preached practical politics from the pulpit. It is reported that he took special interest in the Negro population of the Bedminster district.

In account of a worship service in the days just prior to the Civil War is interestingly told in "The Story of an Old Farm":

"To appreciate what a religious and social factor is Bedminster Church in this well-ordered community, it should be visited on the first day of the week - on a pleasant Sunday morning, when a quiet spirit broods over field and wood, when even busy nature seems at rest and filled with calm repose. But the world awakens, when, with gentle swell, over the valleys and echoing hills sound the sweet music of the swinging bell, pealing from the belfry window, the old, old invitations, Come to prayer! Come to prayer! They come, these country worshippers, from farm, from village and from mill; they come on foot, in wagons, on horseback; some by the dusty highways, some over the peaceful meadows, some through the shady lanes - the immense congregation

gathers. Many approach the sanctuary over the green, stepping from the elastic sward to the broad portico which hospitably faces the portals. Others, leaving the highway at the rear of the building, enter the churchyard through a little wicket, and following a foot path that lies in and among the graves and winds along the side edifice they reach the porch through a second gate. Others, loitering among the grassy mounds, read the crumbling inscriptions on the ancient headstones; while little groups of twos and threes, in sombre garb, stand with bent head and reverential attitude over where sleep their dead, awaiting resurrection.

"Not the least interesting feature of a Sunday morning at this old church is the motley array of vehicles standing at the fences and trees on both sides of the road for a quarter of a mile or less. A strange collection, indeed, embracing every kind of trap in use for the past half century. Here, is a sulky, in which the spruce young farmer has driven his favorite colt to 'meetin''; there, a long-bodied, black covered Jersey wagon, with a rotund old lady backing out over the front wheel and whiffletrees, aiding her descent by clutching cruppers of the horse, who is passive enough after a week at plough or harrow. More modern equipages are not wanting, and occasionally is to be seen the old-time, white-covered, farm wagon, carpeted with straw, with splint chairs from the farm-house for seats.

"An old country Church like this, which draws its people from miles around, means much more than one located near populous town and cities. It is the beating heart, the life-giving centre, around which all the neighborhood interests and hopes circulate. It is also a weekly interchange of news and gossip, and the people on Sunday morning lay in a store for the coming six days not altogether confined to uses of religious and spiritual comfort. As the hour for service approaches the women have passed inside, but the men

gather about the door or under the trees, discussing their horses, the crops and whatever may have been of interest during the past week. This Sunday morning talk is not limited to the one sex, for, on entering, we would find the wives and daughters in animated converse over the backs and partitions of the pews. When the sexton has rung the last bell, by stoutly pulling two ropes descending from the belfry to the vestibule floor, the men come clattering through the doors, which face the congregation on either side of the pulpit. The elders and deacons, first depositing their hats on the sides of the tall pulpit stair, seat themselves to the right and left of the minister, their faces settling into the dignified composesures due their official positions. Gradually a hush pervades the congregation, preceding the solumn invocation. The blessing over, a stir and bustle in the rear gallery proclaim the large choir to be standing. The cherry-cheeked girls are shaking out their frocks, the stalwart youths are clearing their throats; now is the ear of every child in the assemblage alert to hear the first twang of the tuning fork, following which come the long concerted 'do-mi-sol-do' of the choir. They have the pitch, and break away into a loud psalm of praise, or song of thanksgiving, the large congregation taking up the refrain, till the old church rings with that most jubilant of all music, hearty congregational singing.

"And so the service continues, with prayer and praise, and sermon and doxology, not forgetting the collection, taken up in funny little black bags poked down the pews at the end of long poles."

By the time that the Rev. Charles H. Pool accepted a call in 1867, the number of church families had dropped to one hundred and thirty, although three hundred children were still enrolled in the Sunday Schools.

Pastor Pool was especially mission-minded, though

the church never recovered the numerical strength it had in the days of Dominie Schenck. The loss of two daughter churches and a war had contributed to the drop in membership, but the Bedminster congregation recovered a good part of its interest in mission work. The record of benevolent giving during those years is one of the happiest pages upon the minutes of the church.

Charles H. Pool did more than raise funds for world-wide missions. He laid the foundation for the later excellent work of the Missionary Society of this church. It was sometime between 1872 and 1877 that both the Missionary Society and the Ladies' Aid Society began this work. 1873 is a preferred date.

Pastor Pool remained until 1875 and was followed in February 1876 by the Reverend John L. McNair. Dominie McNair's pastorate of sixteen years was characterized by some regrowth of church members, sermons delivered extemporaneously, and the establishment of a Classical Academy in 1877. During his time a Methodist Church was established in Bedminster, near the location of our present church, on the site of the Kouflie and Apgar homes. The old foundation may have been incorporated into a later building but the structure itself was moved to Chester.

The cemetery was enlarged, improved and put on a financial basis of its own. It may seem strange, but it is nevertheless true that a considerable body of people through the years have been attracted to the church by reason of its well-kept churchyard. Much of the foundation work for the present excellent state of the grounds and monuments including the Schomp Memorial building must be attributed to the work of two now deceased officers of the church, Robert B. Nevius and his son, A. Layton Nevius, who took a great personal interest in beautifying the Old Bedminster Churchyard. The tradition has been maintained, much to the credit of present officers and organizations concerned.

Dominie McNair died in 1902 and his remains lie in the church yard.

This church through its long minstry has sent at

least ten of its young men into training for Christian Service: N. H. Van Arsdale, Alfred H. Brush, William Brush, David Sutphen, N. W. Schomp, W. A. Dumont, William McNair, O. M. Voorhees, Wilmen McNair, D. Wesley Shellinger. Robert Honeyman went into the work of the Young Men's Christian Association. Annie G. Demun, a member of the church, married the Reverend M. T. Conklin to add a son-in-law to the list of workers. Richard Mallery and John Robertson who are now ministers in the Reformed Church were young members of this church during the pastorates of their fathers. On the occasion of the two-hundredth anniversary this list is remarkably stimulating.

The pastorate of Thomas Walker Jones lasted fourteen years, from 1892 until 1906. Some who now worship in the third church of "The Reformed Congregation of Bedminster", associate the building with this pastorate. The present structure was dedicated to the service of God, June 24, 1897. Funds were forthcoming to pay for the cost of the new church before it was dedicated. It was decided by the committee in charge to construct the third church in accordance with the popular and accepted style of the period in ecclesiastical edifices. This style has since become widely known as the "Akron Plan" and needs no detailed description. The master builder was Henry Doliver.

The Sanctuary is fan-shaped and seats about three hundred. There are no galleries. To the left of the pulpit is the choir loft behind which is a beautiful stained glass window. The Sunday School room to the rear of the Sanctuary is available for classes and for additional seating capacity at church services.

The exterior of the church is clapboard, the roof is slated and the low gables are shingled. The ceiling is boarded and the wainscoting on the sides rises from the floors about four feet with large stained glass windows on the north and south walls.

There is a partial cellar excavation. The heating plant is steam, using oil for fuel in accordance with modern practice.

The trees planted in the original landscaping have grown luxuriantly, accentuating the church setting. A driveway completely encircles the church, with adequate parking facilities available in the rear.

The present parsonage was erected in 1902 at a cost of \$4,500. An iron fence was built around the entire cemetery and the Schomp Memorial Chapel built.

Dominie Jones left in October and his successor, the Reverend E. R. Kruizenga, came the following July 1907. On December 30, 1908 the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the church was celebrated. The pastor delivered an historical sermon on the occasion which later appeared in brochure form.

Charles G. Mallery came in 1914 and remained through the First World War, until 1919. To be a successful pastor in war years was a painful task in itself. Dominie Mallery brought with him a training and temperment in the strict letter of the law.

The Reverend Jesse F. Durfee succeeded to the pastoral office in 1920 and stayed until 1924.

The Reverend George Moore was pastor from 1925 until 1931. He was followed in that same year by Chauncey N. Stevens; 1931-1940. Pastor Stevens, like Pastor Kruizenga, had a way about him which endeared him to his people. His work and life were outstanding.

During the ministries of Moore and Stevens, church membership dropped to as little as 153. A major reason was the radical change in the nature of the community. The creation of estates through consolidation of farms, begun in the late 19th century, accelerated with fewer people occupying greater areas. It is only since World War II that this trend has ceased and, in fact, begun to reverse itself.

Pastor Stevens was followed by John Dirksen; 1940 to 1944, and by Abram Pepling; 1944 to 1945. Both of these short-term pastorates coincided with the Second World War when fifty three young people connected with this church served with the military forces.

Reverend George I. Robertson, Chaplain and Major in World War II, came to the parish in 1946. Under his pastoral care the church membership increased and the church was opened as a community center. Under his guidance began the cultivation of a reawakening Christian stewardship. One of the outstanding events was the dedication in April 1947 of a fine Hammond organ in honor of those who served in the Second World War. The lighted cross which hangs above the pulpit was placed in special memory of five young men who laid down their lives that we might remain a free America. Mr. Robertson carried on his duties during the transient years when America began the resettlement movement after World War II, and Bedminster began to feel ever so slightly the effects of this movement.

In December of 1950, the Reverend Robertson and his family left Bedminster to carry on work in Long Island City, New York. Bedminster once more began the task of finding a leader for its flock.

In June 1951, Reverend Robert T. Marsh was ordained and installed as pastor. He is a graduate of Montclair State Teachers College and the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. During World War II he served as a Captain in the Air Service Command and for over two years was stationed in the China, Burma, India Theater. Prior to entering the ministry he served in industry for three years. His wife is the former Miss Jean Hoffman, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. James E. Hoffman. Dr. Hoffman is the Stated Clerk of the Reformed Church in America. Mr. and Mrs. Marsh have three children, Brian James, Barbara Sue, and Laurie Catharine. Barbara Sue and Laurie Catherine were born during the present pastorate.

The years since 1951 have seen many wonderful changes in Bedminster and the church. People from the New York suburban area have moved farther out to Bedminster to build their homes and under Mr. Marsh's leadership and guidance, the active church membership has increased from 157 to 274, the highest in close to a century of time. The Sunday School enrollment increased from 113 to 175 and our Benevolent Contributions from \$1071. to \$3171.

With the increase of interest in the world wide mission of the Church the congregation for the first time, has taken a definite share in the support of missionary personnel. Dr. and Mrs. Alfred G. Pennings are our medical missionaries to Arabia. Beginning in this year of 1958, a share has been assumed also in the support of a missionary to the Domestic field, at Brewton, Alabama, not as yet appointed at this writing.

Through the ideas of the new members plus the stability and wisdom of the members of long standing, the untiring leadership of the pastor, and the combined efforts of all, we have been able to add an educational building to the rear of the church at a cost of \$100,000. Mr. Harold Dobbs, an active member of the church, was the general contractor. Ground was broken on June 3, 1956 and the building was dedicated on May 26, 1957.

The former kitchen and kindergarten rooms were converted into the pastor's study, a church office, closets, and lavatories for men and women. The Sanctuary proper is connected with the new building by a ramp leading to three rooms on the second level, one being a large Primary room, another a Junior High room, and the third the Nevius Room for the Senior High Class. The new entrance through wide doors is a half story below and to the left of the ramp. Upon entering, one can turn left, descend a few steps and there he will find a large Junior Department which is separated from the Kindergarten-Nursery room by folding doors. When dinners are served, the doors are opened forming one large room. A spacious and modern kitchen is located to the rear of the Nursery-Kindergarten room.

We are very proud of the new addition and pleased that on some evenings every room is in use, and that virtually every evening some organization is utilizing the various facilities. The League for Service, the Women's Missionary Society, the Society for Christian Service, the Youth Fellowship, the Men's Brotherhood, the Consistory, and the different boards which serve with it are some of the church groups that meet here regularly. The Lions Club of Bedminster-Far Hills, The Brownie Scouts and the Far Hills-Bedminster Alcoholics Anonymous are among the most constant community

groups using the new building.

Coincidental with the increased membership of the church and church school, Youth and Junior choirs have been organized that together with the Senior choir and a trumpet quartet are an inspiration to the worship services. The Christmas Eve Candlelight Service and the Choral Festival Service in which all choirs participate have become impressive annual highlights.

The first activity to commemorate our 200th Anniversary was the entertainment of the Denominational Board for the Christian World Mission at its spring meeting in May. This is the first time our church has had the privilege of entertaining one of our national boards. As one of its final acts at this meeting the Board passed the following resolution:

RESOLVED: That we express our gratitude to the Reformed Church of Bedminster, New Jersey, for the privilege of sharing in its memorable 200th anniversary, and for the opportunity to hold our meeting in this historic church during its anniversary year.

The fine facilities of the sanctuary, social and dining rooms have provided adequately and comfortably for the meetings of the board and its committees; the unobtrusive services rendered by the pastor, consistory and members of the church have been thoughtful, kind and conducive to the devotion of maximum attention to the work of the board; the members have enjoyed true Christian hospitality; for all of these we express our sincere thanks.

We extend to the members of the Bedminster Reformed Church our sincere congratulations upon the completion of two centuries of fruitful service in the ministry of Christ's Kingdom. May God grant his blessings to this congregation in their work and efforts to carry this rich heritage of service through the years to come.

Two hundred years have come and gone since the

first farsighted people felt the need and formed the Reformed Church of Bedminster. The church has stood as a symbol of faith to those who have entered her portals through the many years of trials and joys. She has ever been thankful for those who have given unselfishly of their time and efforts to make her strong. We, who are members of this church, owe much to those who have gone before us. The church is still thankful for all those who work today to help keep her strong. It is our hope to pass on the great gift that we have received from the past to those who will take our places in the future - may that gift be stronger and finer because we have passed this way.

HECKMAN

B I N D E R Y, I N C.

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